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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR OES/STC, OES/IHA, AND EUR/WE

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SUBJECT: MADRID SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TIDBITS

1. Madrid's ESTH Officer periodically groups together and reports ESTH developments that might otherwise "fall below the reporting bar." Key issues will continue to be reported via "stand alone" cables. ESTH Officer Ken Forder welcomes feedback at forderk@state.gov.

2. INDEX:

- A. Policy change on embryonic stem cell research.
- B. Government plans 25 percent increase in R and D budget.
- C. Spain's largest private medical research facility opens.
- D. Inter-ministerial science commission altered.

A. POLICY CHANGE ON EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

3. The Health Ministry announced that in October, the Spanish cabinet would issue a Royal Decree Law that would permit embryonic stem cell research in Spain. The new law will reportedly allow research only on embryos that were stored in "In Vitro" fertility centers prior to November, 2003 (in keeping with the terms of Spain's November 2003 Assisted Reproduction Law). The new law will reportedly regulate the conduct of embryonic stem cell research and how donor consent must be obtained. The Royal Decree Law will be an interim measure until the overarching Assisted Reproduction Law of November 2003 can be amended to permit such research, including on embryos placed into storage after November, 2003.

B. GOVERNMENT PLANS 25 PERCENT INCREASE IN R AND D BUDGET

4. Hoping to keep his campaign promise, President Zapatero announced that his 2005 national budget proposal would include a 25 percent increase in R and D funding. Justifying his request, Zapatero said the increased funding would "permit policies that attract Spanish as well as foreign researchers who are working in other countries. It will especially boost research in sectors key to improving (Spain's) competitiveness: pharmaceuticals, space, telecommunications, biotechnology, clean energy technologies and sustainable development." In 2002, Spain officially spent 0.97 percent of its GNP on R and D. The EU average is reportedly close to 2.0 percent of GDP.

C. SPAIN'S LARGEST PRIVATE MEDICAL RESEARCH FACILITY OPENS

5. Spain's largest private medical research center opened September 20 at the University of Navarra. The Research Center for Applied Medicine (CIMA) will focus its research on: neurology, in particular Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases; cardiovascular diseases; oncology; gene therapy; and, hepatology. Over 300 scientists will work on 22 official projects in the above areas. 70 percent of the center's 33 million euro start up costs were financed by the private sector. A consortium of 15 corporations has promised to pay over 75 percent of the center's estimated 200 million euro operating costs for the 2004-14 period. The balance of the financing will come from research grants (both public and private) as well as other forms of public funding. The center's director, Francisco Errasti, said he hoped that many Spanish scientists working abroad would come back to Spain to work at the center. The head of the center's gene therapy department, Jesus Prieto, ruled out any research with embryonic stem cells, saying his team would use only adult stem cells.

D. INTER-MINISTERIAL SCIENCE COMMISSION ALTERED

6. The Government's Inter-Ministerial Science Research and Development and Technological Innovation Commission, which was established on May 14 by the then just-elected PSOE government, was scrapped in September before even meeting for the first time. The September 3 Royal Decree Law abolishing the still-born Commission noted that it would have been redundant with the extant Inter-Ministerial Science and

Technology Commission (CICYT). The CICYT is charged with inter-agency coordination of science and technology-related issues that cut across ministerial lines. The Royal Decree Law of September 3 also assigned operational control of the CICYT to the newly established Ministry of Education and Science and Technology.

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